

Sandberg Panther

Custom basses are everywhere these days, with the most high profile makers usually being of American origin. However, one German make has begun to ruffle the feathers of the custom builders — Sandberg.

David Etheridge

Sandberg have made a name for themselves in recent years, starting with a 'Bass of the Year 2004' award in other magazines, allied to ecstatic net user reports. Their current bass range mainly comprises Fender P and J look-alikes (refined with Sandberg's own distinctive touches), the upmarket Custom range of fretted and fretless five-string instruments, the four-string Terrabass low-B model, and the Basic, Ken Taylor and Bullet models. The Panther range is the latest addition to the stable, comprising the Panther and Panther Special, which are each available as fretted or fretless four- or five-string models.

Black Panther

This month, I'm looking at the Panther model in its four-string fretted guise (the Panther Special adds three-band EQ and higher spec body woods to the basic model). As with the rest of the Sandberg range, these have the classic body shape derived from the Fender original, but with a few unique tweaks — as one might expect from what is essentially a custom instrument maker.

The high-gloss, black-finished body is alder, with a five-bolt fixing for the maple neck. The neck offers 22 frets (with a zero fret next to the top nut) and a rosewood fingerboard. The rosewood here is a darker shade than you may expect, which matches the body and the black facing of the front of the headstock. The hardware is Sandberg's own brand, with chunky Precision-style tuners, a string tree on the headstock and a substantial chromed bridge with fully adjustable individual saddles.

The twin pickups are Sandberg's own make, rather than the Delanos used on other models. In the past, Sandberg reportedly couldn't make enough of its own pickups to satisfy demand, but they are in evidence here, distinguishable by the raked angle of the pickups and the split pole pieces for the upper and lower pairs of strings. The pickups are routed to the onboard active/passive

Performing Musician

Sandberg Panther bass
£899

The Panther is an excellent example of a custom bass using tried and tested approaches at an affordable price. Beautifully made and finished, with a wide range of flexible sounds and a perfect setup and playing position, it has a feel, aura and mystique all of its own.

Synergy Distribution
+44 (0)121 270 6485
www.synergymusic.com
www.sandberg-guitars.com

Four-string bass

EQ, with a convenient flip-top battery compartment on the back of the body. Four control pots cover master volume, pickup balance (which sweeps the tonality distinctively as you turn it) and treble and bass EQ.

In use

The Panther is a gorgeous looking bass and the balance is exemplary. The body curvature is understated; all the edges have transition curves, giving a classy feel and look that lets it blend in with your anatomy very comfortably. The subtle curvature at the neck join makes high register playing very smooth and comfortable for your thumb position, which, combined with the generous cutaway, gives an effortless result. The neck profile is narrow and also contributes to an easy playing style.

I found that full chording and double stops across all four strings was perhaps the easiest I've ever encountered, and the setup makes slapping styles a doddle. As I'm amongst the world's worst when it comes to slapping, I was amazed at how well I could play on this bass!

The electronics give very good results throughout. When pulled out, the front Volume pot switches the bass into passive mode, which produces a very serviceable Fender sound. The Hi and Low EQ pots provide a wide range of very rich tones, running the gamut from Fender to almost Rickenbacker clank at times. According to UK distributor, Synergy, one of the Sandberg demonstrators does a mean line in clavinet impressions on this bass (look for it on the Sandberg website!) There's plenty of bottom-end body and smoothness, while the high end rings out clearly and provides harmonics that are clean and clear throughout the range.

Conclusion

Once again, we have a handmade bass of the highest quality at the sort of level that you'd expect to cost many times the price. Just a few minutes trying out one of these in your local music shop, and you'll see why the plaudits have come thick and fast. This is a bass with its own unique identity and approach, and one that oozes class and quality from the start. The playing balance, weight, action and neck are all ideal, while the range of sounds is wide and gives a powerful aura to whatever style of music you're into. With no vices and many delightful features, the Panther will undoubtedly gain many more fans as people get to know the name. ■ **PM**

Tech Spec

Panther bass

- Maple neck with five-bolt body fixing.
- Rosewood fingerboard.
- 22 frets (fretless four- and five- string versions available).
- Alder body.
- Twin Sandberg pickups.
- Sandberg hardware.
- Gloss black finish.
- Two-band passive/active electronics.
- Also available: Panther Special model with walnut/mahogany body and three-band EQ.

